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While comparing special education programs in Nigeria and the United States of America, the paper reviews the problems of special education in Nigeria. The comparison briefly hints at the federal role, special education categories, models of funding, admission into special education programs, procedural safeguards, and provisions for special education administrators. Cultural factors that have affected the perception of the handicapped are reviewed. Recommendations for policy makers and program planners in developing countries like Nigeria include reeducation of society, development of a national policy on special education, and strengthening of teacher education. (Author/CL)

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COMPARISON OF SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS IN NIGERIA AND THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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I was a high school teacher in Nigeria for many years. Presently, I am working on my Ph.D. degree in Special Education at New Mexico State University, Las Cruces. I am a member of the Council of Exceptional Children, Phi Delta Kappa, and the National Association for the Visually Handicapped. My publications include, (a) Our special children: Handbook for parents of exceptional children in Nigeria, Las Cruces, N.M.; New Mexico State University, 1982 (and Federal Ministry of Education, Lagos, Nigeria), (b) The Universal Primary Education Program in Nigeria: Revisited. Resources in Education, June 1985 (ERIC ED 253 342); and (c) Who needs philosophy? Those who seek freedom and life, Round Up, 87(7) September 1985, 6-7, New Mexico State University, Las Cruces.

Abstract

While comparing special education programs in Nigeria and the United States of America, this paper reviews the problems of special education in Nigeria. The comparison briefly hints on the federal role, special education categories, models of funding, admission into special education programs, procedural safeguards and provisions for special education administrators. Appropriate recommendations are also made for policy makers and program planners in developing countries like Nigeria.

Introduction

Special education is a new phenomenon in the Nigerian educational system, and tremendous efforts have been made to improve the socio-economic and educational structures of the country. However, there are problems of inculcating special education into the general system, and of establishing a suitable philosophy that would reflect all the basic structures of the system. Many developing countries find themselves in this situation. Unfortunately, the policy makers tend to create more problems than solve existing ones. They institute change policies in theory, but pragmatically fail to infuse the policies into the general machinery of the socio-political system.

This paper presents an analysis of special education problems in Nigeria. The systems of special education in the U.S. and Nigeria are compared from different dimensions, and necessary recommendations are made.

Special education in Nigeria: An overview

Brief background--Nigeria, like many other developing countries, is a country in a hurry. To meet the challenges of the 20th century and move toward the 21st century, Nigeria will have to take giant steps in a few years to cover what took the world powers centuries to achieve. Nigeria has a population of over seventy million people. She has 250 ethnic and language groups scattered all over the nineteen states of the federation, and 299 local government areas (UNESCO, 1983). Nigeria gained her independence from Britian in 1960, yet she is still dependent on other countries for socio-economic survival. Staley (1963), in his classical work, made the following salient contrasts between the developed (e.g. U.S.A.) and the developing (e.g. Nigeria) countries:

Developed (e.g. U.S.A.)	Developing (e.g. Nigeria)
1. High level economy	1. Low level economy
2. Manufacturers	2. Consumers
3. High per capita income	3. Low per capita income
4. Large percentage of technical experts; Efficiency and experts	4. Peasants and agregarian, inefficiency and poor organization
5. Education geared toward the needs and philosophy of the people	5. Education was little relevance to the philosophy and needs of the people
6. Well organized and stable political system	6. Transitional political system
7. Independent for many years	7. Recently antonomous or still colonial
8. Preventive health programs; Low mortality rate	8. Disease and squalor; High mortality rate

Eke (1972), the then Federal Commissioner for Education, listed the national objectives of Nigeria as follows:

1. To make Nigeria a strong and self-reliant nation;
2. To make Nigeria a great and dynamic economy;
3. To make Nigeria a just and egalitarian society;
4. To make Nigeria a free and democratic nation;
5. To make Nigeria a land full of opportunities for all its citizens.

It is unfortunate that little or no attempt has been made to put the above objectives into practice. Currently, Nigeria imports her technical know-how and even food from America and other world powers. The economy is in a mess, and the dream of an educated Nigerian is still to push a pen behind an office desk. The country is ruled by a military government and democracy is disturbed. Bude (1983) stated that the education received from the British colonial masters still haunts the Nigerians.

In September 1976, Nigeria took a giant step to institute the Universal Primary Education (UPE) program with the aim of eradicating illiteracy, ignorance, and superstition. However, after nine years of its inception, the UPE still suffers from many setbacks such as poor organization, poor

financing, zero emphasis on rural education and special education, and lack of specialists and experts. Diamond (1984) and Urwick (1983) have discovered that virtually all socio-economic and educative decisions are politicized. Urwick believed that the military government instituted the UPE program not really to meet the needs of the country, but to boost their political credibility.

Special education in Nigeria--In 1975, Mrs. Ruth Ogbue (in charge of Special Education Unit of the Federal Ministry of Education, Lagos, Nigeria), started reviewing the special education facilities in Nigeria. According to her, "at present, there is no national policy on special education, therefore the responsibility for special education is left to the discretion of the individual states. Even where the education laws of the states make mention of special education, they give no definite mandate for educating handicapped children." The discoveries of Mrs. Ogbue (1975; 1981) will automatically present the stand of special education in Nigeria. They include the following:

1. 27% of the number of teachers involved in special education are trained specialists.
2. There are only five categories catered for the blind and partially-sighted; the deaf and partially-hearing; the physically handicapped; the mentally retardates; and the hospitalized children.
3. No recognized facilities for pre-school handicapped children in all the categories.
4. A high percentage of the money spent came from individual gifts, local and international organizations and voluntary agencies.
5. Annual subventions came from the Ministries.
6. No systematic screening facility is available for the handicapped. The only assessment center in the whole country is in the Child Guidance Center, Lagos.
7. There are no facilities in the country for the purchase and technical maintenance of special education equipments and teaching aide.

The above findings by Mrs. Ogbue give excellent description of special education services in Nigeria. In the United States, litigation and legislations have played great roles in the provision of special education services, PL 94-142, the Education of the Handicapped Act, is a result of the litigations and legislations. In Nigeria, the impact of the pressure groups is little or non-existent because of the level of illiteracy of the people. Onwuegbu (1977) stated that care of the handicapped in Nigeria is relegated to the background because of ignorance, superstitions and taboos related to ethnic cultures. In a study conducted at the Federal Teachers Training College, Ibadan, Ondo State of Nigeria, Onwuegbu revealed cultural factors that have affected the perception of the handicapped as follows:

1. Curse from God
2. Family sins
3. Offenses against gods
4. Witches or wizards
5. Adultery
6. Misfortune
7. Ancestors
8. Misdeed of previous life
9. A warning from God
10. Evil spirit
11. Killing certain forbidden animals

It is evident that a group of people with the above perceptions would care less about the provision of education for the handicapped.

Comparison of Special Education in Nigeria and U.S.A.

Federal role--In the United States, the Federal government plays important roles in special education. The roles are: (a) making mandatory laws like in the writing of Individualized Education Program (IEP) for an individual, (b) making permissive laws like research funding, and (c) providing funds directly to state and local government. As stated earlier, there is no mandatory law in special education in Nigeria.

Special education categories--In the United States, the categories catered for depend on the states. For example, in California, there are eight categories of exceptionalities while there are nine categories in the state of New Mexico. In New Mexico, the categories are: Behavior disordered, communication disordered, visually impaired, hearing-impaired, gifted, learning disabled, physically-handicapped, mentally handicapped and the multiply-handicapped. In Nigeria, there are just five poorly defined categories.

Models of funding--In the United States, there are three models of funding; they are:

1. PL 94-142--Here children are counted.
2. Personnel--Services are counted.
3. Excess cost--Funds are provided according to levels A, B, C, D (e.g. in New Mexico).

In Nigeria, funds are provided by individuals as gifts, by local and international organizations and by voluntary agencies.

Admission into special education--In the United States, the sequence of admittance into special education follows:

1. Screening
2. Referral
3. Evaluation

4. Identification

5. Individualized Education Program.

In Nigeria, no systematic screening facility is available for exceptional children. There is only one assessment center in Child Guidance Center in Lagos.

Procedural safeguards--In the United States, there are procedural safeguards under PL 94-142. They include (a) mediation, (b) impartial hearing, (c) appeal process, and (d) surrogate parent. In Nigeria, there is not even a law, let alone procedural safeguards.

Provisions for administrators--In the United States, PL 94-142 has crucial provisions for special education administrators. They are:

1. Free appropriate public education
2. Least restrictive environment
3. Evaluation and placement
4. 1 EP
5. Personnel development
6. Procedural safeguards
7. Funding

While there are problems facing school administrators in the United States, in Nigeria, there are very few specialists who know what special education is all about.

Conclusion and Recommendations

It is evident from the citations and discussion presented above that the Nigerian Model of special education needs short and long term changes. The changes will have to start from the grass root levels up to the highest echelon of governmental levels. They are:

1. The general society needs re-education. No country can survive with excessive politicization of its social, economic and educational decisions.

2. The UPE should be revisited. Illiteracy, ignorance and superstition should be eradicated, not at the detriment of promoting the cultural beauties of the people. This should be done with care so that the feelings of some Nigerian citizens will not be hurt. Special children should be taken care of if the UPE will be successful. Vocational education should be inculcated into the curriculum of the UPE.

3. There should be a national policy on special education.

4. The Federal Ministry of Education should invite carefully selected specialists to formulate a suitable special education policy.

5. The Federal Ministry of Education should mount child find activities, and engage in concrete decisons on screening and identification policies.

6. The federal government should give guidelines to state and local governments.

7. Teacher training of specialists should be strengthened. Related professionals should be trained.

8. There should be Federal Resource Centers built in each state capital for purposes of transmitting information.

9. Special education should be expanded from pre-school level to the college level.

10. On the whole, there is no level that does not need change in most developing countries. The educational system should reflect the philosophy of the people.

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